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Territorial Accommodation in South Vietnam

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

9 June 1970

TERRITORIAL ACCOMMODATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

This study paper on territorial accommodation in South Vietnam is intended for background use in consultations with the GVN and in preparing for negotiations with the other side. It was originally prepared in response to one of several requirements levied on the Ad Hoc NSC subcommittee on Vietnam by the NSC Review Committee on 10 July 1969 in conjunction with NSSM-37. The terms of reference for this paper, as set forth in a 14 July 1969 memorandum to the members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Vietnam, were reproduced in toto in the original paper, Territorial Accommodation in South Vietnam, 28 August 1969.

This paper was drafted by CIA in accordance with the above terms of reference and coordinated with the other members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Vietnam. In addition to updating the graphics used in the original paper, the conclusions and text of the original have been modified where subsequent events or analysis justified a revision.

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I. OVERVIEW

1. Territorial accommodation implies a rational allocation of land areas to opposing political forces so that a reapportionment on the basis of realized political strength can reduce the level of violence and permit some degree of coexistence. The parties to this accommodation may consider it as a permanent solution, but it is more likely that both will regard accommodation as a prelude to achievement of ultimate supremacy. While the criteria for such an allocation might not be infinite, there are certainly a large number of ways to approach the question. Furthermore, each criterion and allocation is open to a variety of means of execution--adding further complexity to any reallocation proposal.

2. The security aspects of the Vietnam problem have never lent themselves gracefully to geographic analysis. Graphic depictions of various permutations of the Vietnam war have been useful in describing the many facets of the conflict--population density, Communist activity, transportation security, military deployment, etc. A rational system of territorial accommodation, however, requires that all of these factors be integrated in some systematic manner; a process that seems somewhat beyond our present capability. Additionally, even though an accommodation may be termed territorial, it must, by its very nature, ultimately be political. The added factor of political allegiance must therefore be considered in any schema of territorial accommodation, yet it is a variable on which there is relatively little hard data.

3. Although the course of the Vietnam war has frequently required that both sides temporarily place strategic or, more frequently, tactical emphasis on physical control of some segment of territory, the conflict is and has been primarily one of struggle for political control over people, a struggle in which territorial acquisition has played

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a minor role. This fact is a result not only of the Communists' philosophy of how to pursue an insurgent war--"A Peoples' War"--but also of the very character of South Vietnam itself. Perhaps the dominant feature of South Vietnam is that the majority of the people live in a small portion of the total area of the country.

4. The general nature of the population distribution can readily be shown graphically, and our information on the country's population is reasonably accurate. Even this relatively "hard" information, however, develops quicksilver-like qualities when an attempt is made to pursue it as a depiction of area control, population control, or political allegiance. The final appearance of a population density map, assuming reasonably detailed census data, is determined by the size of the division used in calculating the densities--province, district, an arbitrary rectangular area, etc. Each method has its merits but each, in turn, obscures some aspect of the population information. In general, all of the population density maps which are based on a given political subdivision tend to obscure radical differences in the rural-urban differentiation within that subdivision. (A population density map of the United States, for example, if done on a state-by-state basis would not give an inkling that cities like Las Vegas or Reno even existed.) The method of arbitrary rectangular areas, that is, dividing up a country into say, one-kilometer squares, provides the most accurate picture of population density itself, but ignores the political environment in which the population lives.

5. South Vietnam's population density characteristics along with the nature of the war as it has thus far been pursued by both sides have combined to create an area control situation which is significant in any discussion of territorial accommodation. Most of South Vietnam's geographic area is under the control of neither side. This characteristic is illustrated by a comparison of Map 6 with Map 3. The distribution of hamlets is

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quite sparse in Chuong Thien. Most of the area is uninhabited, and it is therefore somewhat misleading to apply an average score to the entire geographic area enclosed by a village. Military units of GVN, the US, the VC, and the NVA, roam these areas, but there is no attempt on their part to exert physical control over such areas in any permanent fashion. Despite the presence and impact of US forces, the terrain and natural cover prevalent in South Vietnam makes it unlikely that this situation will change radically in the coming months. As a result, a large portion--perhaps the largest--of South Vietnam is not really subject to a meaningful analysis of territorial security at all, and is really a form of no-man's land. This no-man's land can often be extremely close to populated areas and consequently cannot be considered as a neutral entity in assessing the effect of territorial accommodation. Furthermore, it is not a fixed quantity, but is instead determined at any given moment by where opposing sides choose not to go. The ability of both Communist and Allied forces of any type to move freely in areas close to populated areas represents a security threat that no reallocation of political authority can completely eliminate.

6. Inasmuch as neither the GVN nor the Communists have any real hope of attaining true control of the vast no-man's land that constitutes the bulk of South Vietnam's territory, they both have emphasized political objectives, and, concurrently, people rather than acreage. Any territorial settlement, therefore, which failed to emphasize political factors would appear predestined for disaster. In this environment, any decision by the GVN to seek a territorial accommodation will have a significant political impact and, subsequently, a strong influence on the final picture of Communist and GVN territorial control. In a crucial way the addition of this variable tends to create an atmosphere of serious uncertainty about our ability to rationally reallocate areas of GVN and Communist influence. The feasibility, stability, and ultimate impact of a territorial settlement will also be affected by

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the solutions to several other questions, such as:

- unmolested traffic from one area to another
- the handling of economic trade
- the role of existing military forces
- the treatment of refugees
- the charter under which local authorities of any political persuasion will operate

7. The difficulty in assessing the impact of these variables is not limited to Americans alone, and therefore the prospect of a territorial settlement is probably not very appealing to the GVN. The same reasoning process, along with a bitter aftertaste from previous accommodations is almost certain to dampen the Communists' ardor for this type of settlement as well. While it is possible that the objections of both sides could be removed, it is less certain that terms of territorial settlement acceptable to both sides could actually be reached, especially the terms of a settlement which could produce a situation of any lasting stability.

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II. THE CURRENT TERRITORIAL SITUATION

8. The best data currently available on security in South Vietnam are the scores derived from the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES). The HES system, however, is not really a very effective device for measuring territorial security. The bulk of South Vietnam's land area is not under any control and therefore virtually all of the country's population--whether GVN or VC aligned--live under some form of threat to their physical security. Additionally, there is a tendency for the average security score of any given geographic or political subdivision to mask widely divergent security environments. A given province in South Vietnam may contain not only a large city solidly under GVN control but also an NVA divisional headquarters. Even a smaller political unit, e.g., a district, may contain a large, semiurban center of GVN activity at one end and a major element of COSVN at another.

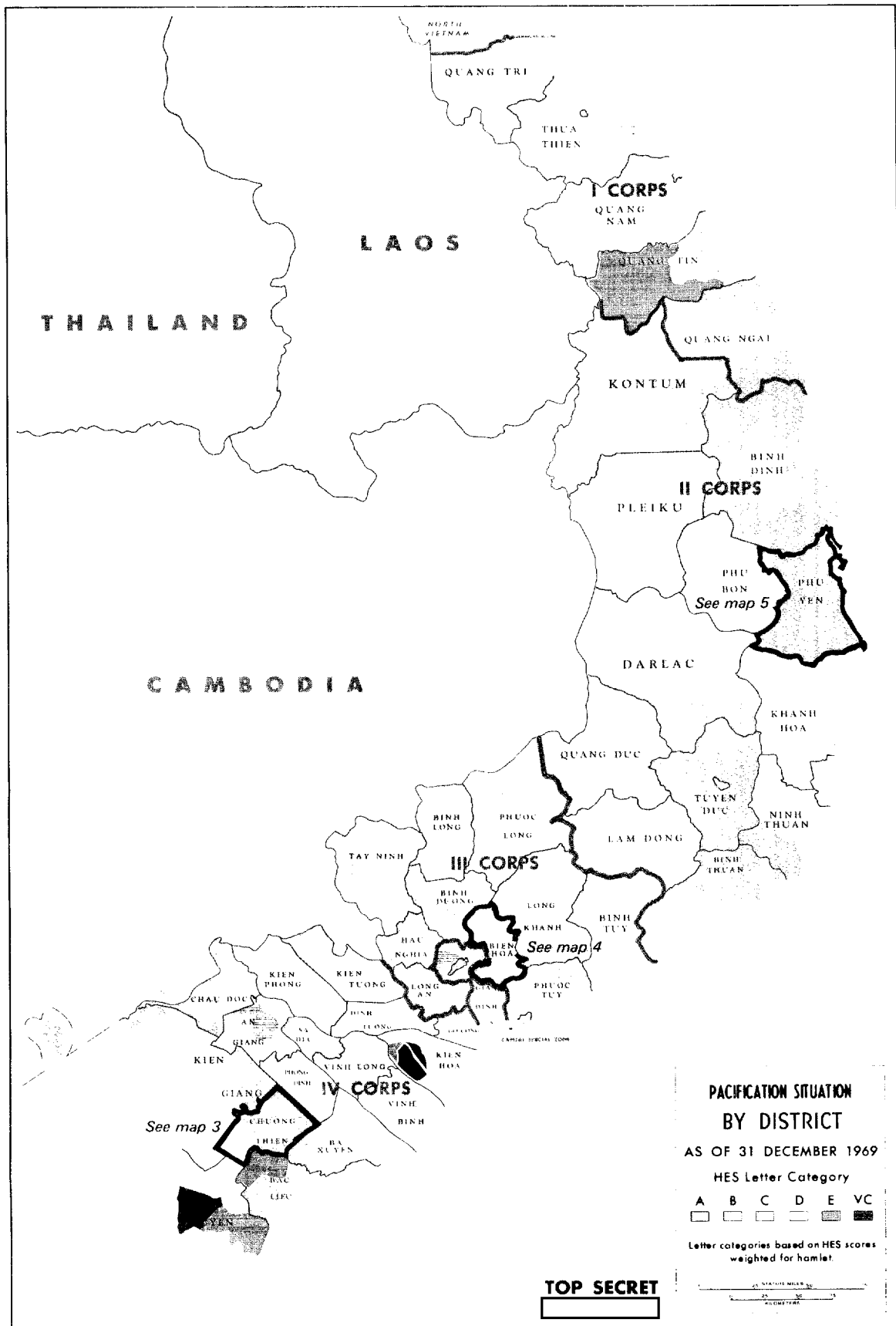
9. To illustrate this environment, the following sequence of maps is presented. Map 1 depicts the HES scores of the entire country, taking each province as an entity. Map 2 depicts the same HES data taking each district as an entity. Maps 3, 4, and 5, present three selected provinces to show that even a district is not a political entity and there may coexist within that district villages which are widely divergent in their security environment and their political alignment. Map 6 depicts the location of each rural hamlet of Chuong Thien Province and identifies these hamlets according to their control status. In general, this map depicts what is a common pattern of GVN and VC influence throughout South Vietnam, that is, a tendency for GVN influence to be lower in more rural areas.

10. Disaggregating the HES data down to the village level does not eliminate the tendency of averages to obscure differences--there may be hamlets of divergent persuasions within the village--but it has the merit of dealing with a level

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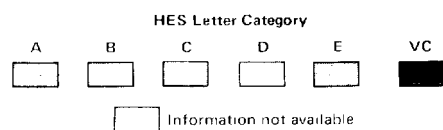




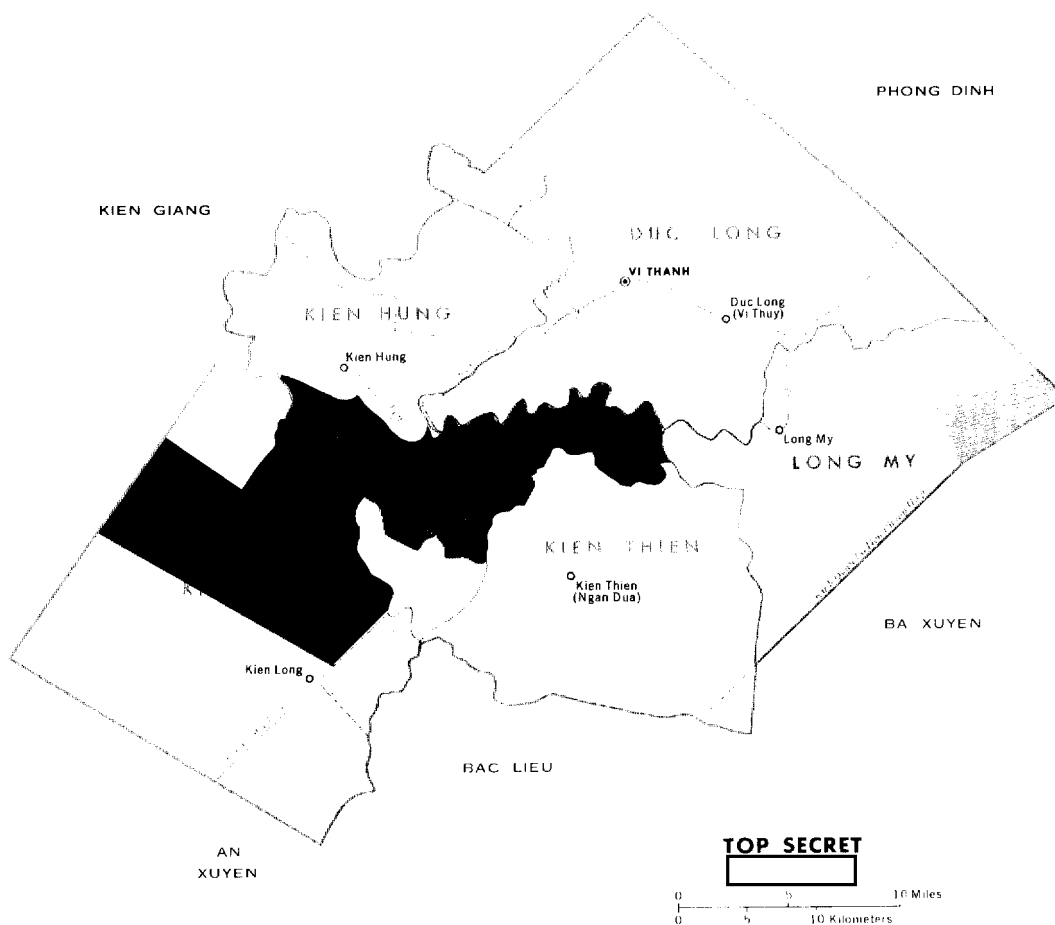
Map 3

CHUONG THIEN

PACIFICATION SITUATION BY VILLAGE as of 31 December 1969



Letter categories based on HES scores weighted for hamlet

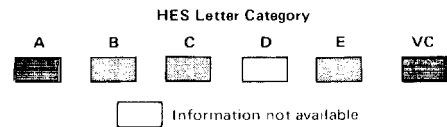


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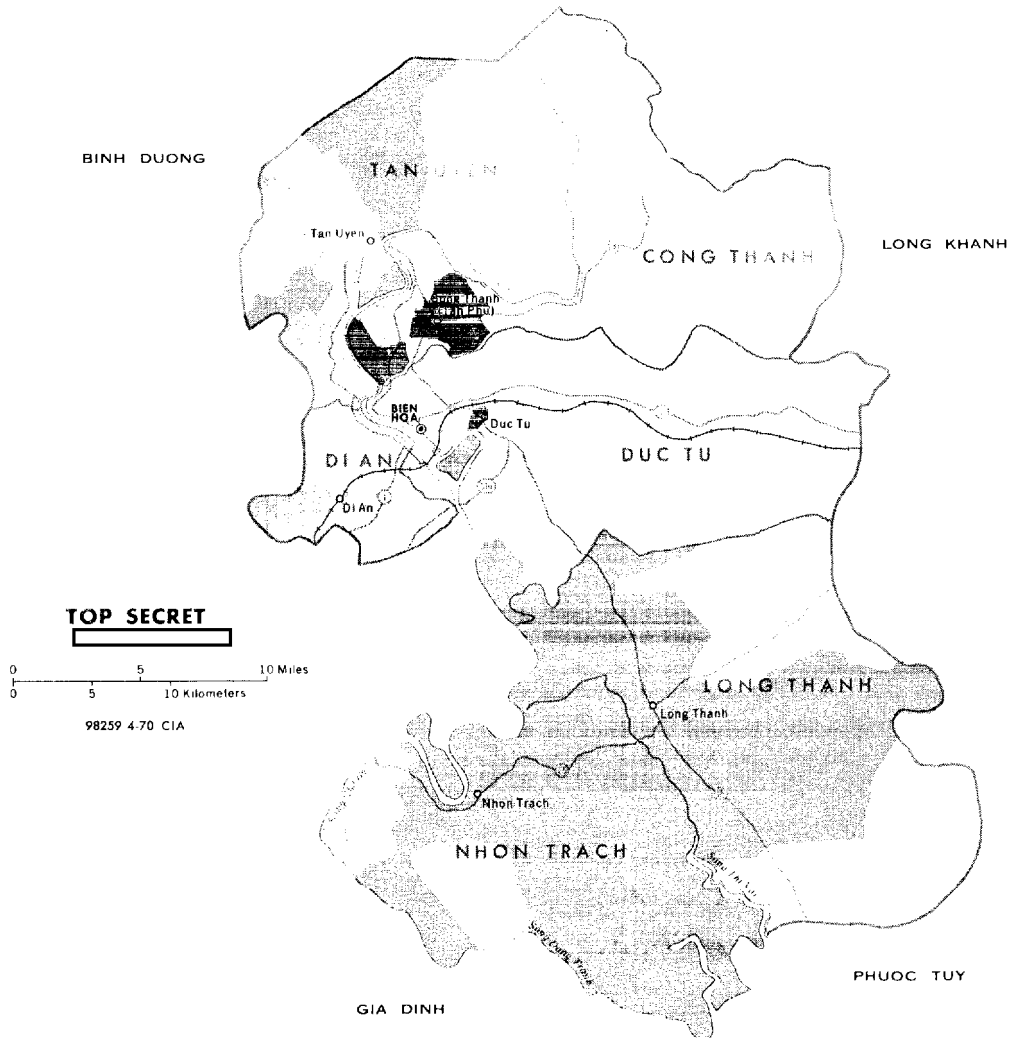
Map 4

BIEN HOA

PACIFICATION SITUATION BY VILLAGE as of 31 December 1969



Letter categories based on HES scores weighted for hamlet

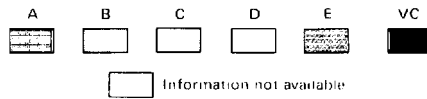


Map 5

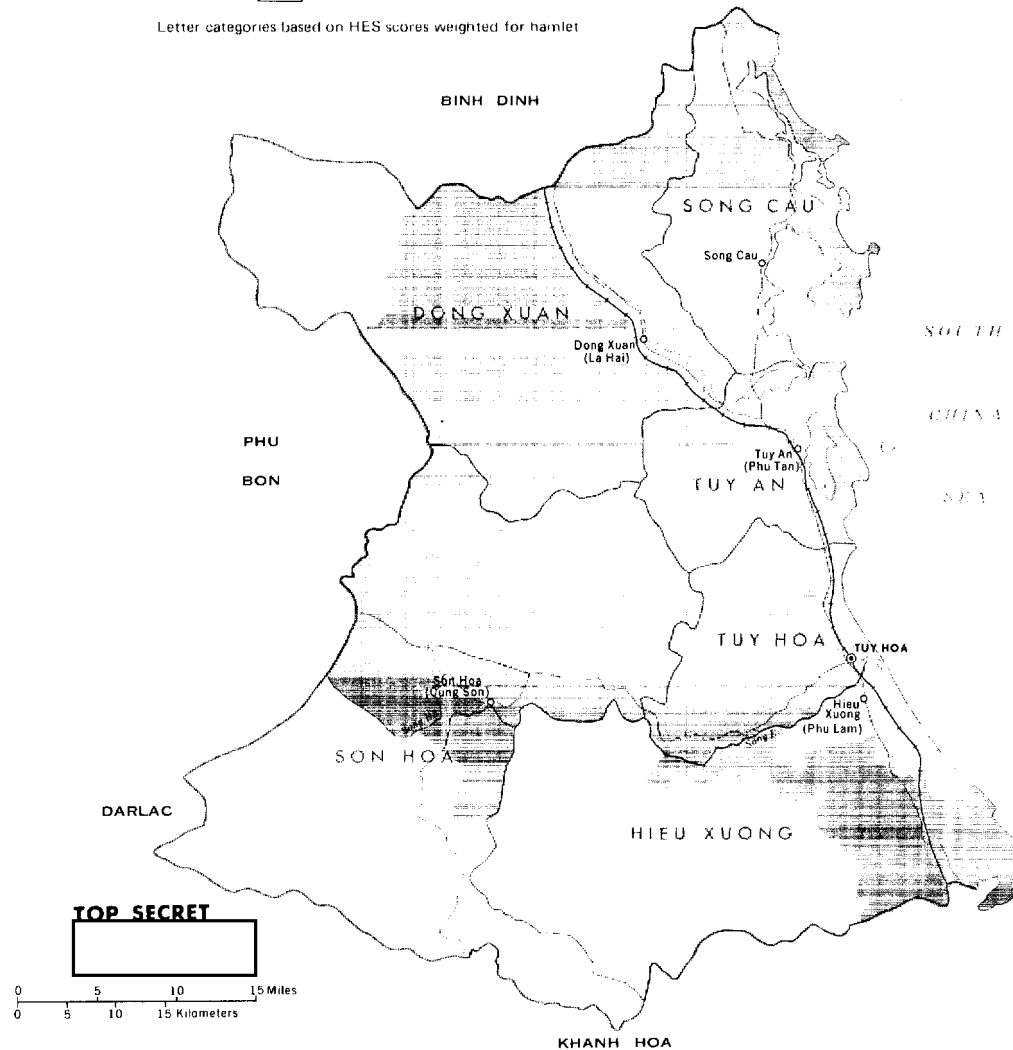
PHU YEN

PACIFICATION SITUATION BY VILLAGE as of 31 December 1969

HES Letter Category

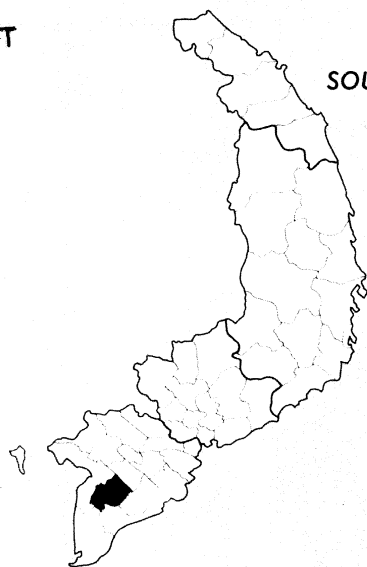


Letter categories based on HES scores weighted for hamlet



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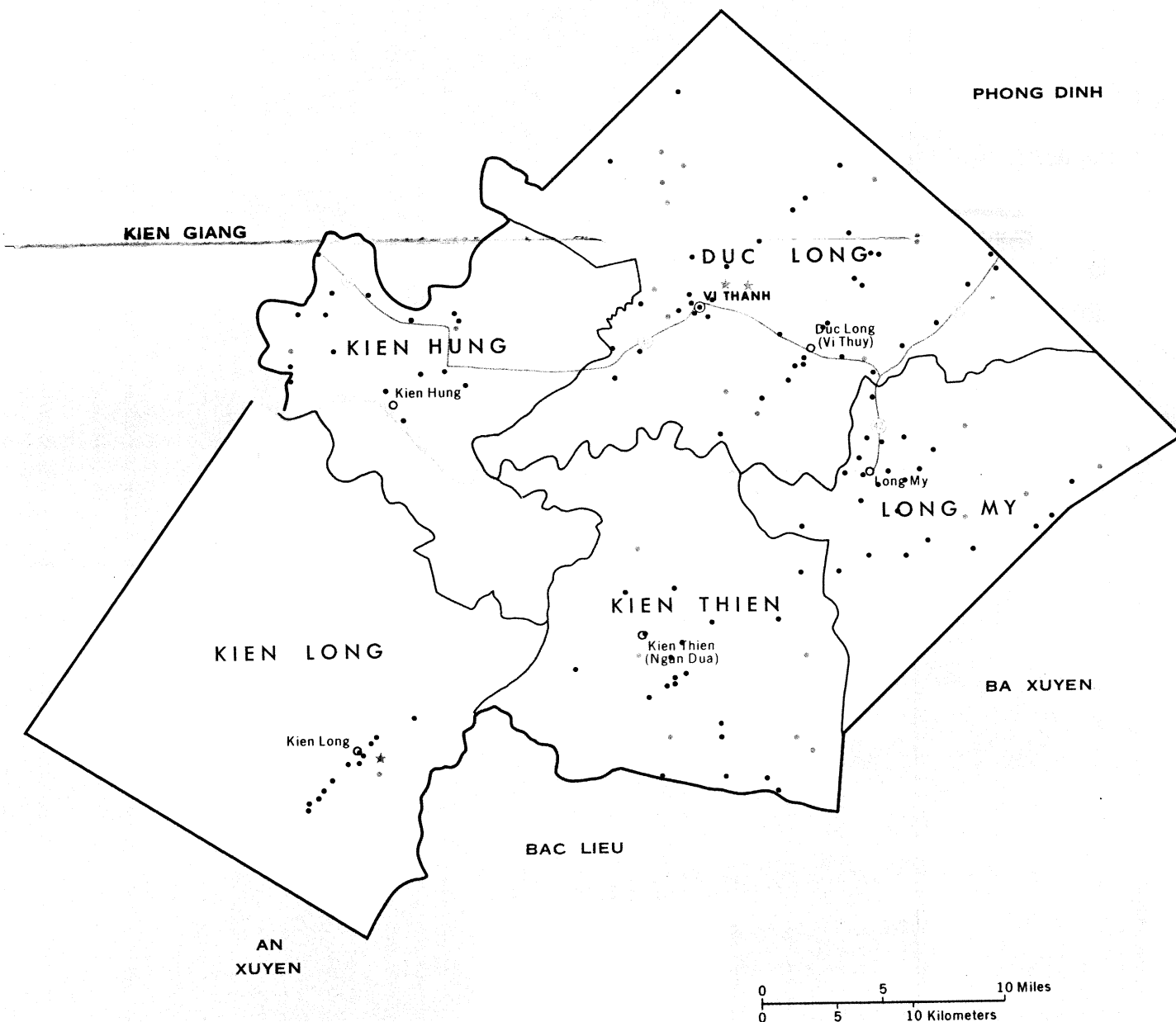
CONTROL SITUATION IN CHUONG THIEN PROVINCE AS OF DECEMBER 1969



SOUTH VIETNAM

VSSG Control Criterion 2
Under VC ControlVSSG Control Criterion 3
Under VC Influence• VSSG Control Criterion 4
Influenced by Both Sides• VSSG Control Criterion 5
Under GVN Influence• VSSG Control Criterion 6
Under GVN Control

Each dot represents one hamlet.
Source of data is the Hamlet
Evaluation System (HES); modified
to conform with VSSG Control
Criteria.



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of political and geographic organization which has remained remarkably stable over the years. The South Vietnamese village is the smallest form of political and social organization that not only has some form of territorial boundary that could be expected to be stable under settlement conditions but also can be assumed to have at least a semblance of unanimity of political allegiance.

11. Analysis of the graphic information in Maps 3, 4, 5, and 6 suggests that at least two major problems must be solved before a territorial accommodation can be achieved and stabilized. The first is that most villages, as such, are not committed unalterably to either the GVN or the VC. Some means must be established for these villages to decide which way to cast their lot. In most cases these villages have an elected GVN official who is an open, public figure. Some of the villages undoubtedly have in addition a VC official, possibly also elected, who operates an underground government. While it is tempting to suggest that an open election would settle the issue, it should be borne in mind that there is no guarantee that, whatever the good intentions of the GVN and NLF, the village population would abide by the results of the election whichever way it went. There is at least a possibility that the village could be further Balkanized into feuding hamlets, or the underground VC government may continue to function regardless of the results.

12. The second problem is one of enclaves. Many, if not most, of the villages which are solidly pro-GVN or pro-NLF adjoin or are surrounded by uncommitted villages, or even by those of opposite persuasion. Should a territorial accommodation not provide for the economic and social livelihood of these enclaves but instead foster a polarization, the stability of the settlement would almost certainly be short-lived.

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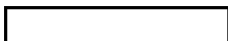
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III. THE FEASIBILITY OF TERRITORIAL ACCOMMODATION

13. The fact that neither the VC nor the GVN areas of solid strength are contiguous raises serious questions as to the feasibility of a territorial accommodation. From a political standpoint, supporters of both the GVN and the NLF might well consider such a settlement a defeat for their side, even though their reasons for believing this might be quite different. This effect would probably dilute the political power of these opposing forces just when such power is needed to enforce the terms of settlement. In this context, however, the effect would probably be considerably more demoralizing to the Thieu government which, given the elective process which produced it and the constitutional base on which it rests, is more sensitive to discontent. With the stability of the Thieu government seriously questioned, the substructure of local GVN officials would likely be demoralized at least to the point of preferring inaction to pursuit of political goals. While the level of political apathy cannot be predicted with any degree of certainty, there is little reason to think that local GVN officials--particularly in areas now considered "contested"--would be galvanized into greater action by a territorial settlement.

14. The prime reason for disarray at the local government level in these circumstances is that the operational feasibility of a territorial accommodation is heavily dependent on the terms of settlement. Local GVN authority now exists under a charter from Saigon under which the criteria for action are spelled out fairly clearly. For example, to be VC is to be a criminal. Under the terms of territorial accommodation, however, a district chief might now have hundreds of recently legalized VC within his jurisdiction. The degree to which these people would be subject to some form of control by a province or district chief would have to be spelled out in considerable detail in order for these local officials to operate effectively. Questions of the degree of political activity acceptable, restrictions



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on trade, personnel movement and general law enforcement almost certainly would have to be part of a territorial agreement so that local officials would have at least a framework within which to operate.

15. One of the general assumptions underlying territorial accommodation is that the reconcentration of civil and military forces resulting from the writing off of areas to the VC would permit a rise in the level of security and control that the GVN can exert in its own areas. The GVN can unquestionably get more mileage from its resources if the area to be controlled is reduced. There are, however, three factors which reduce the net comparative advantage which the GVN would gain from resource consolidation.

16. First, a considerable amount of this force is already deployed much as a civil guard in areas of strong GVN control. Second, the RVNAF may have to provide security in non-contiguous areas while being proscribed from entering adjoining terrain recognized as Communist controlled. Under these conditions, the impact of the RVNAF on the level of security is uncertain. Third, the impossibility of completely preventing unauthorized movement between VC and GVN areas means that the security of the new, smaller GVN areas will remain subject to challenge.

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IV. POSSIBLE ROUTES TO ACCOMMODATION

17. General Routes: There are two general routes to forms of territorial accommodations: negotiated and unnegotiated.

18. The negotiated route has the obvious advantage of making rules of conduct and territorial claims part of an agreement package. To the extent that the GVN could sustain its authority throughout these negotiations and their aftermath, such an approach would be more durable than an unnegotiated territorial accommodation. Negotiations could begin at a general level of mutual recognition of authority and proceed from these to a detailed allocation of areas. In a long negotiation on a village-by-village basis, the GVN might be able to keep to the necessary minimum the territory it "concedes" to the Communists and also retain control over the type of local accommodation needed to preserve the economic and demographic viability of its "own" villages.

19. Exactly what such a negotiated accommodation would look like is difficult to predict. The current HES scores on villages and hamlets would not, by themselves, be a sufficient guide to the final settlement. Both the GVN and the Communists would have to settle for reasonably contiguous areas of aligned population which could be effectively administered and provided with physical security. As a result, there might well be areas under current GVN control (according to HES) which would have to be ceded to the Communists because they could not be effectively governed subsequent to a settlement.

20. An unnegotiated territorial accommodation has the disadvantage of greater potential instability but the advantage of presenting less difficulty of implementation since any practical lower level contacts or arrangements to carry it out need not be acknowledged formally by either of the contending political authorities. Moreover, it would probably arise as a tacit consequence of a

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cease-fire,* with each side hoping to gain pre-eminence through the respite in military activity and the new opportunities for political organization and economic reconstruction. How this balance of advantage would in fact fall cannot be predicted. The GVN would be subject to great dangers from the decline in RVNAF's effectiveness, the easier movement of the VC into urban and semi-urban centers, or other strongly GVN-controlled areas, and the capacity of the Communists to intimidate and perhaps recruit local GVN officials. The Communists, on the other hand, would have to reckon with such factors as loss of combat and political elan, migration to rejoin families in GVN zones, and susceptibility of their adherents to attractive economic conditions in GVN-controlled areas.

21. Specific Routes: There are several specific routes to territorial accommodation which could be taken under either a negotiated or un-negotiated settlement.

22. A mutual military de-escalation, whether negotiated or not, would produce a de facto territorial accommodation in certain areas and over certain periods of time. However, without some means of linking this mutual de-emphasis of military effort to specific political control, this would provide at best only a beginning, i.e., the physical (territorial) and psychological environment for further negotiations or some other more specific form of political settlement. The physical environment, nonetheless, would give the

**Note: This paper does not consider the pattern of temporary control which would result from a standstill cease-fire without mutual withdrawal. That pattern would reflect only the disposition of military forces (including US forces) at the time of cease-fire, and not necessarily--or even probably--the actual disposition of political control resulting from a settlement itself.*

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Communists a seat of government which they have been unable to secure through either military or political means thus far.

23. Locally negotiated cease-fire agreements, could conceivably be steps toward an over-all territorial settlement. However, because of their limited nature and the uncertainties of their actual terms, they would have little chance of surviving long in the absence of a broader understanding or over-all agreement at higher levels between the major parties--the GVN and the PRG.

24. Under certain conditions, regroupment could possibly be a route to territorial accommodation. Agreement on regroupment of US and North Vietnamese forces would result in at least temporary de facto partition of South Vietnam. If regroupment were followed by NVA withdrawal and reassertion of GVN control over the areas in question, this temporary partition would not constitute territorial accommodation as the term is used in this paper. In the absence of agreement on NVA withdrawal, the areas into which the NVA regrouped could be considered as being for practical purposes ceded to the enemy for what might be a long period of time. Partition amounting to a type of de facto territorial accommodation would have taken place, but with the crucial difference that the accommodation would be between the GVN and the NVA/VC rather than between the GVN and the VC. Even in the case of an agreement calling for withdrawal of non-South Vietnamese forces, actual redeployment of NVA units from regroupment areas into North Vietnam could conceivably be made contingent upon local understandings about the degree of residual VC authority in these areas. The resultant arrangement could amount to a form of territorial accommodation.

25. A territorial accommodation through elections, with both GVN and Communist control being determined thereby, is a route that could be taken in "semi-negotiated" form. The results of these elections would, theoretically, at least, reflect each side's de facto control of population and territory. One sub-route in this direction might involve the functioning of mixed electoral commissions, provided the Communists modified their present



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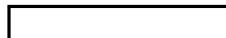
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strong opposition to discussing the terms of such commissions. This kind of electorally sanctified accommodation might be less dangerous politically to the GVN than either a fully negotiated accommodation, with all the inherent risks of internal upheavals, or a wholly unnegotiated one with the political situation largely undecided and, in effect, "up for grabs." In many respects the Communist capacity for exploiting such a confused situation would be superior to that of the non-Communist nationalists.

26. The merits of the "semi-negotiated" route by the electoral process, however, are not without counterpart problems. This route would require a GVN/Communist agreement on local election methods and on the local authority which would run the elections. The two sides are far apart on this issue, and the degree of cooperation--or even communication--required to reach agreement is not in sight. In addition, if such elections were held and the results favored the GVN, the Communists might decide to renew the violence in the calculation that the GVN would have been militarily weakened by the cease-fire arrangements accompanying the elections.

27. A territorial accommodation in Vietnam resulting from an international conference of an Indo-China or even wider scope would differ from such an arrangement arising out of a conference on Vietnam alone. For one thing, potential areas of enemy control in South Vietnam might be drawn, taking into account the extent and location of any such areas in Laos and Cambodia. There could conceivably be multilateral negotiations on the location of enemy regroupment areas spanning international borders. International agreement on the location of enemy regroupment areas either partly or wholly in Laos and Cambodia might make it easier to reach agreement on limited areas of this nature in South Vietnam. It appears most unlikely, however, that the GVN and the Governments of Laos and Cambodia would agree publicly to delineation of regroupment areas within their respective borders except as a temporary



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measure and part of an agreement on NVA withdrawal to North Vietnam. Thus, if a type of territorial accommodation should result from an international conference it probably would reflect an unnegotiated and perhaps unstable arrangement.

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V. CONCLUSIONS

28. The foregoing discussion suggests some of the major difficulties that would arise from any effort to negotiate a territorial accommodation. The existing areas of strong allegiance to either side tend to form a highly complex pattern of enclaves which would be difficult to support by either side militarily, politically, economically, or socially.

29. In military terms, the GVN would be virtually precluded from exercising effective use of all of its armed forces by virtue of the fragmented and diffuse nature of the population and areas under its control. This in turn would complicate the GVN's ability to call for outside assistance in the case of what it considered to be external attack, since there would be no clear areas of contiguity. This factor, together with the difficulty of determining the actual disposition of the respective military forces throughout the large "no-man's land" areas involved, would risk creating conditions conducive to renewed violence and disorder. Major improvements in mobility, communications, and fire support for RVNAF might help to offset these difficulties, but effective GVN use of its military assets would be extremely difficult under a territorial accommodation.

30. In demographic terms, major portions of pro-government population, notably the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai, would be isolated from effective contact with the pro-government elements closer to Saigon. Apart from this, there would probably be major population displacements within the country which could quickly produce a chaotic situation for the GVN.

31. In political terms, any such type of accommodation would be an obvious derogation of GVN sovereignty and would therefore be difficult for any GVN to accept. Virtually every non-Communist politician (of whatever stripe) and the GVN in all

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its policy statements have taken a stand against further "partition" of the country; it is hard to imagine any GVN which could negotiate such a partition and still survive. Assuming it could be arrived at, such an arrangement would constitute a loose form of federalism at odds with the philosophy of both non-Communist nationalists and the Viet Cong. Assuming the Viet Cong would even agree to this kind of arrangement, the chances are that their superior organization and discipline would prove more effective in consolidating control within their areas and in weakening GVN control.

32. It is, therefore, difficult to conceive of such an accommodation being arrived at by negotiation at the national or the local level, at least under present circumstances. Hanoi and the PRG, totally committed to centralized administration along authoritarian party lines and determined to replace the present GVN leadership, would probably be no more inclined to negotiate this kind of an accommodation as a permanent or semi-permanent settlement than would the GVN.

33. However, if Communist efforts in Paris and on the ground fail to achieve their purposes and if they conclude that local territorial accommodations might work to their interests without detracting from their over-all objectives, it is possible that the Communists would encourage development of such accommodations where they now exist and would seek to extend them without any formal negotiations. Such a decision could be an outgrowth of mutual military de-escalation or it could take place while a fairly high level of military activity was continuing.

34. It is also possible that de facto territorial accommodation could be accomplished through some form of elections which confirmed local political realities in connection with an agreement on regroupment and withdrawal. The GVN might be willing, for instance, to pay a price in de facto local autonomy in order to get the NVA first into

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regroupment areas and then back to North Vietnam. The other side might be induced to move NVA forces out of the regroupment areas to North Vietnam on the basis of local understandings about the degree of residual VC authority in these areas, as determined through local elections under locally-oriented commissions. The national framework under which this could take place might remain a serious obstacle, however, with the Communists almost certain to reject any arrangement which resulted in even temporary de facto recognition of GVN national authority, at least so long as the present leadership remained in power.

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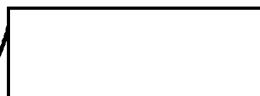
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